

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

# The Annals of Iowa

---

Volume 70 | Number 2 (Spring 2011)

pps. 165-166

---

## Little Paul: Christian Leader of the Dakota Peace Party

Michael Knock  
*Clarke University*

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2011 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

---

### Recommended Citation

Knock, Michael. "Little Paul: Christian Leader of the Dakota Peace Party." *The Annals of Iowa* 70 (2011), 165-166.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1533>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

*Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (1991). Unlike them, however, she is considerably more critical of the white forces and policies that devastated traditional Indian lifestyles.

In describing the central role of Indians, Wingerd presents an alternative, thought-provoking view of frontier Minnesota history. Unfortunately, her work is marred by a number of inconsistencies and factual errors. Lack of systematic editing and proofreading is evident by such things as stating first correctly that Dakota means allies (1) and then incorrectly (365) that it means the people. With respect to factual errors, for example, all of her five considerations of the Minnesota-Canada boundary contain erroneous information. In depicting Indian history, she consistently claims that the Yankton and Yanktonai Sioux were Lakota (Western Sioux); actually, they were Nakota (Middle Sioux). Despite these shortcomings, Wingerd offers a new perspective that challenges some long-standing traditions about Minnesota's past.

*Little Paul: Christian Leader of the Dakota Peace Party*, by Mark Diedrich. Rochester, MN: Coyote Books, 2010. 232 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 paper.

Reviewer Michael Knock is assistant professor of history at Clarke University in Dubuque. His dissertation (University of Notre Dame, 1996) was "'Alone with Sitting Bull's People': The Dakota Indian Mission of the Congregational Church, 1870–1937."

A member of the Western Wahpeton peoples of west central Minnesota, Mazakutamani — or Little Paul — seemed to be present at every important event that took place in western Minnesota during the 1850s and '60s. His contacts during this critical period are a veritable who's who of Minnesota history, including missionaries Stephen Riggs and Thomas Williamson, General Henry Sibley, and Little Crow, the Dakota leader typically credited (or blamed) for the U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862. Through it all, Little Paul represented a bridge between the policies of native assimilation and native resistance in mid-nineteenth-century Minnesota.

In *Little Paul: Christian Leader of the Dakota Peace Party*, Mark Diedrich works to shed some light on this interesting figure. Diedrich's study of the Dakota people is thorough, beginning with a description of the culture and society of the Wahpeton people before moving on to the arrival of two missionaries, Thomas Williamson in 1835 and Stephen Riggs two years later. Riggs and Williamson agreed that con-

version to Protestant Christianity must also be accompanied by abandonment of the traditional Dakota way of life. They encouraged the Dakota to give up hunting and warfare in exchange for farming and a more settled existence. In fact, in many ways, *Little Paul* is almost as much a history of these missionaries as it is a history of their charges.

Little Paul was one of the Dakota who accepted the missionary challenge. A member of the Hazelwood community, he became an important mediator with more traditional Dakotas. In 1857 he negotiated the release of young Abbie Gardner, who had been kidnapped by Inkpaduta during his attack on the tiny northwest Iowa settlement at Spirit Lake.

Yet the appointment of corrupt Indian agents and traders made it difficult for Little Paul to fulfill his hope to improve conditions for the Dakota people through further negotiations. These men, along with growing pressure to open up Dakota lands for settlement, widened the rift between Little Paul's assimilation faction and the more traditional groups led by Little Crow. The rift erupted into the U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862, a war that resulted in the forced removal of most of the Dakota people to Crow Creek Reservation in Dakota Territory.

Diedrich's book is well researched, relying mainly on primary sources. He also provides maps and hand-drawn illustrations of many of the main characters in his story. However, Diedrich's account is often hard to follow. He is so intent on telling the story of Little Paul that he sometimes fails to adequately explain events in their larger context. For example, he explains that the missionary work of Riggs and Williamson takes place amid the Second Great Awakening, but he makes no effort to explain how mission work in Minnesota fit into the larger evangelical movement. Even the story of captive Abbie Gardner seems anticlimactic. Little Paul's role in this event is well described, but Inkpaduta's motives and his attack on the Spirit Lake settlement receive little attention. Gardner herself seems to be a mere supporting character in the story.

Finally, Diedrich seems eager to place his work in the historiography of "middle ground" studies, yet he makes little attempt to explain the phrase or to relate his study of Little Paul to other works in the field. It is this middle ground that makes Little Paul such a fascinating figure, especially when most histories of Indian-American relations in the upper Midwest are dominated by stories of warfare.

Still, Diedrich makes a valuable contribution to the scholarship on Dakota-U.S. relations during a critical period in each culture's history. The book should be of interest to scholars of this period and those who study Minnesota history.